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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, source of all goodness, use our lawmakers today for Your glory. Make them undaunted people who strive to know Your will and experience Your power. Provide them with exactly what they need to accomplish Your purposes. May they receive Heaven's approbation for their faithful service to You and country. Lord, transform their intractable problems with solutions from Your throne. We commit the work of this day to You, receiving Your strength to honor Your Name.

And, Lord, we thank You for the faithfulness of our summer pages. Bless these young people as they prepare to leave us.

We pray in Your generous Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The President pro tempore.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1460

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1460) to provide for the modernization of the energy and natural re-

sources policies of the United States, and for other purposes.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Rao nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Neomi Rao, of the District of Columbia, to be Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until the cloture vote will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, Senators and the White House are continuing discussions on the path forward for bringing relief from ObamaCare and its collapsing markets. We have made good progress, and we will keep working. As we do, our focus will remain on the major ObamaCare problems that continue to hurt Americans all across our country.

Under ObamaCare, premiums have skyrocketed. Over the past several years, ObamaCare has caused premiums to climb by an average of 105 percent in the vast majority of States on the Federal exchange, and it has caused them to triple in some States.

Next year, ObamaCare is expected to raise premiums again, as high as 30 percent or greater in States like Connecticut and Virginia, by as much as 40 percent or greater in Maine and Iowa, and by as much as an astonishing 80 percent in New Mexico. Obviously, Americans deserve a lot better than that.

Under ObamaCare, choices have diminished, even disappeared, in States all across our country. ObamaCare has left 70 percent of counties with little or no insurance options on the exchanges this year. Even worse, next year, dozens more counties could have zero choice at all—potentially leaving thousands trapped, forced by law to purchase ObamaCare insurance but left without the means to do so. For instance, as we learned just yesterday, as many as 14 of Nevada's 17 counties could now be left without any insurance options under ObamaCare at all in 2018. Americans deserve a lot better than that.

Under ObamaCare, mandates have forced families into plans they don't want or can't afford, preferred doctors have become less accessible to many

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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patients, and plans have grown less desirable but more extensive. Americans deserve better than that. That is why we are continuing to work hard. Fixing ObamaCare's failures and protecting families from its consequences is not an easy task.

It is disappointing that our Democratic colleagues made clear early on that they were not interested in joining our efforts in a serious, comprehensive manner, especially given how many of their constituents have been hurt by the law they themselves voted for and continue—continue—to defend. The Republican conference continues to work through solutions to help those who have been hurt by this failing system because, as we can all agree, ObamaCare's status quo is simply unsustainable and unacceptable. We have to act, and we are.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks before the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING ARTHUR J. JACKSON

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, we lost another great American this month with the passing of Arthur J. Jackson. He received the Medal of Honor in 1945 for his service in the Pacific theater of World War II. His name may not be as familiar as it once was. In retirement, he lived a quiet life. I didn't want to let his death pass without paying tribute to him, his family, and the extraordinary acts of courage with which he defended our country. Although, to be sure, "extraordinary" doesn't really describe the half of it.

It was September 1944, and Private Jackson, a 19-year-old Ohio native, was serving with the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division on the island of Peleliu. Their mission sounded simple enough: Take the island as quickly as possible, inch ever closer to retaking the Philippines, and ultimately defeat Japan.

Simple it wasn't. His platoon was hailed by a steady stream of fire from a heavily fortified position. To charge forward would be to march toward certain death, and that is exactly what he did. He attacked a pillbox, holding about 35 enemy soldiers, and as his Medal of Honor citation reads, "[P]ouring his automatic fire into the opening of the fixed installation to trap the occupying troops, he hurled white phosphorus grenades and explosive charges brought up by a fellow Marine, demolishing the pillbox and killing all of the enemy."

The enemy fire continued unabated, his cover was light at best, and yet Private Jackson proceeded to storm one position after another—wiping out a total of 12 pillboxes and 50 enemy soldiers. It was a stunning act of bravery. I can only imagine the pride of President Truman when he pinned the Medal of Honor on Private Jackson's uniform. I can only imagine the awe of his fel-

low Americans as they showered him with ticker tape in a New York City parade to celebrate.

Yes, Arthur Jackson was one of the greats, and like with many great men, his career had a somewhat tragic ending. After a stint in the Army, he re-joined the Marines and was stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in September 1961. It was only months after the Bay of Pigs and just over a year from the Cuban Missile Crisis. Tensions were high; suspicions were too.

On one night, then-Captain Jackson discovered a Cuban busdriver in a restricted part of the base. He wasn't supposed to be there, nor was he authorized to be there. The man had been identified as a spy for Fidel Castro's regime but was allowed to keep his job for the time being. Captain Jackson and a fellow officer escorted the man to a back gate to see him off the premises, only to discover the gate was locked. While the other officers went off to find tools, Captain Jackson pried the lock open, and, suddenly, the man lunged at him, aiming for a sidearm. Captain Jackson fired back in self-defense and killed the man on the spot.

Instead of reporting the man's death, however, he and some of his fellow Marines buried the body on the base. Many decades later, he told a newspaper columnist he feared, if he reported the death, he would be tried in a Cuban court and possibly tortured.

He had hoped no one would find out, but word got out, and he was forced to leave the Marine Corps. He ended life as a mail carrier in California. It was a disappointing end to an until-then brilliant career. This was a man who loved his country, who put everything on the line to defend it, and if one night that love blinded his judgment, it only shows the intensity of his commitment.

Arthur Jackson went on to work for the Veterans' Administration in San Francisco before moving to Boise, ID, in 1973. He lived out the remainder of his life there, where he was beloved by the community. As a neighbor of his put it, "He flies the U.S. flag and the Marine Corps flag every day. It bothers him if someone flies a dirty or tattered flag. He tells them to take it down and replace it."

A little thing with a big meaning: Arthur Jackson showed as much love for the flag as he did for our country, and now we lost him to the ages. We still have his memory, his example, his stories of derring-do, which will inspire future generations of Americans for decades to come.

REMEMBERING JOE DALE BURGESS

Mr. President, I attended the signing ceremony at the White House last week for the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. It was a happy occasion, but I received some sad news.

A son of Arkansas who served in uniform passed away earlier this year at the far-too-young age of 31. His name was Joe Dale Burgess. Though he was not widely known, he was especially

well loved by all who did know him. Today I want to recognize him briefly for his service.

Joe Dale served in the U.S. Army—specifically, Delta Company, 2-506th Infantry Battalion, 101st Airborne Division; 2-506th, the same unit in which I served in Iraq.

In March, 2008, he was deployed to Khost Province in Afghanistan, where he took the fight to the enemy for 12 straight months. He was a fearless soldier, but his platoon leader says what he will probably be best remembered for is being an awful comedian. He loved to crack jokes and play pranks, even though, as his best battle buddies attest, he didn't show a particular talent for either of them. He always got laughs, and he always lifted their spirits. When you are living in a war zone, I can tell you that counts for a lot.

But in his battle buddies' minds, Joe Dale means more than memories of sharing a few laughs. What stands out is his humility. His platoon leader says he was completely selfless. He did whatever was asked of him—no matter how unpleasant, no matter how tedious, how irritating, or how dangerous. He never lost sight of the mission. He never forgot why he was there, and it made an impression. Ask any one of his battle buddies what they think of Joe Dale, and you will not get a bad word out of them, not one in the whole bunch. His platoon leader says: "We would all gladly serve with him again." That is a pretty good measure, the quality of a troop.

I am sorry to say Joe Dale, who endured a tour of duty that cost the lives of seven soldiers in his company, died in April of testicular cancer. It had spread to his spine, which after several surgeries left him paralyzed. He suffered several other afflictions: PTSD, pain in his joints, trouble sleeping. He didn't ask for care or a disability rating from the VA until it was too late.

It seems so unfair that this man—a man who braved the mountains of the Hindu Kush, a man who was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Army Commendation Medal—ultimately succumbed to disease at home at such a young age. In fact, it seems almost cruel because he left behind a fiancée, Alice Hart, and a 2-year-old daughter, Zoe Hart-Burgess. I suppose we must remember that the Lord God in Heaven has His own purposes, and He works in His own mysterious ways.

To see the outpouring of love for this man—a quiet man, a humble man, a man whose only ambition was to serve his country—it tells you, indeed, that Joe Dale Burgess was one impressive man. May he rest in peace.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Neomi Rao, of the District of Columbia, to be Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget.

Mitch McConnell, Chuck Grassley, Deb Fischer, Steve Daines, Luther Strange, Bob Corker, Thom Tillis, Tom Cotton, Tim Scott, Johnny Isakson, Richard C. Shelby, Michael B. Enzi, Richard Burr, John Hoeven, David Perdue, Roy Blunt, Todd Young.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Neomi Rao, of the District of Columbia, to be Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN), the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. UDALL), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 59, nays 36, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 155 Ex.]

YEAS—59

Alexander	Flake	Murkowski
Barrasso	Gardner	Nelson
Blunt	Graham	Paul
Boozman	Grassley	Perdue
Burr	Hatch	Portman
Capito	Heitkamp	Risch
Carper	Heller	Roberts
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rounds
Cochran	Inhofe	Rubio
Collins	Isakson	Sasse
Corker	Johnson	Scott
Cornyn	Kennedy	Shelby
Cotton	King	Strange
Crapo	Lankford	Sullivan
Cruz	Lee	Thune
Daines	Manchin	Tillis
Donnelly	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McCaskill	Wicker
Ernst	McConnell	Young
Fischer	Moran	

NAYS—36

Baldwin	Feinstein	Merkley
Bennet	Franken	Murphy
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Murray
Booker	Harris	Peters
Brown	Hassan	Reed
Cantwell	Heinrich	Schatz
Cardin	Kaine	Schumer
Casey	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Coons	Leahy	
Cortez Masto	Markey	
Duckworth	Menendez	

Stabenow	Van Hollen	Whitehouse
Tester	Warren	Wyden

NOT VOTING—5

Durbin	Sanders	Warner
Hirono	Udall	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 59, the nays are 36.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Alaska.

TRIBUTE TO SOLOMON "SOL" ATKINSON

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, every week I have been coming down to the floor of the Senate to talk about a special Alaskan, someone in my State who, through their hard work and community service, whether to their neighbors or to their country, makes Alaska a better place for all of us. We call these people the Alaskans of the Week. Learning about these individuals and sharing their stories with my Senate colleagues, Alaskans, and Americans who watch what we do here or who are in the gallery, is probably one of the best parts of my week every week.

Like most of my colleagues, I will soon be going home for the Fourth of July. We will celebrate this very special holiday with our families and our communities. Some of us will go to barbecues or march in parades or attend other community gatherings. Some of us will gather in spots across our State and watch fireworks. Personally, I will be with my family catching king salmon at my family's ancestral fish camp up on the Yukon River, one of my favorite places in the entire world.

Regardless of where we are, all of us will certainly feel a swell of pride for our country. We will remember the hard-fought battles that brought us independence, and we will remember those who have served and sacrificed to keep our country the land of the free and the home of the brave. They are the heroes among us, and Alaska is chock-full of these heroes.

Today I want to recognize one of them, a very special hero who is our Alaskan of the Week—Solomon Atkinson, who spent nearly his entire adult life serving our country with honor and dignity and now serves his community in Alaska tirelessly.

Let me tell you a little bit about Sol and his illustrious career in the military. Sol was born in 1930 to Harris and Elizabeth Atkinson in Metlakatla, AK.

Metlakatla is on Annette Island on the Inside Passage, where so many Americans take cruises to see the glaciers and the whales. It is home to the only federally recognized Indian reservation in our State.

Sol could have continued to live in Metlakatla, where he was a commercial fisherman as a young man, but, like so many patriotic Alaskans, he chose to leave his home and join the military. Sol joined the U.S. Navy, and for 22 years—from 1951 to 1973—he had by anybody's standards a remarkable patriotic military career.

In 1953, Sol volunteered for the Navy's legendary Underwater Demolition Team and was deployed to the Pa-

cific, including Korea. Some history buffs will know and recall that the Underwater Demolition Team, the UDT, was the precursor to the present-day Navy SEALs—frogmen, as they liked to call themselves. In fact, Sol was on the very first Navy SEAL team created by President Kennedy in 1962, and I have a copy of the SEAL Team One plank owners certificate, commissioned on January 1, 1962, with Sol's name proudly displayed.

So Sol became a Navy SEAL—the first Navy SEAL, literally. He became a SEAL team training instructor, training new Navy SEAL recruits. He was affectionately referred to as "the Mean Machine" by the Navy SEALs. He also had the honor of training 48 astronauts, including Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Jim Lovell, just to name a few, in underwater weightlessness simulations. His prized possession is a framed plaque bearing the signature of all those astronauts, all those American heroes whom he trained.

Sol completed three combat tours in Vietnam. By the time he retired from the military, he had earned numerous awards and medals for personal valor, including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. But what is truly remarkable about Sol is that after he retired from the Navy, he moved back home to Metlakatla and continued to serve his country and serve his community. He served on the Indian Community Council, on the school board, and as mayor of Metlakatla. He has also been very involved in veterans affairs and was the president of the first veterans organization on the island and was instrumental in starting that organization. He has spent years reaching out to his fellow veterans to make sure they receive the benefits, honor, and dignity they earned.

Jeff Moran, the superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Metlakatla, said this about Sol:

I could go on and on regarding the wonderful things that Sol has done for his community. We would not be here today without his leadership and knowledge [and commitment].

I, too, can go on about Sol. Many Alaskans can go on about Sol and all the things he has done. But I also want to mention, particularly on the eve of the Fourth of July, that he is part of a long tradition in my State of Alaskan Natives who have served in the military, who have served our country even during darker times in our history when many Alaskan Natives were discriminated against and denied basic rights.

On the eve of the Fourth of July, we celebrate America's independence but also in particular those who have fought for that independence over the last 200 years. As I mentioned, one proud element of my great State is that we have more veterans per capita than any State in the country, and Alaska Native veterans serve at higher rates in the U.S. military than any

other ethnic group in the country—something I like to refer to as a special kind of patriotism because they have been doing this for decades, like Sol—even at times, as I mentioned, when the country hasn't always treated that group of patriotic Americans with the respect and dignity they deserve. Sol personifies this special patriotism.

The SEALs who served with him wrote this about him in a tribute:

Sol's story will continue to be told by the men he trained, by the officers who relied on him, by the Frogmen who all respect him. An officer, a gentleman, an athlete, a friend, Sol Atkinson is all of these, but of all of these traits, he is first a Frogman.

We can see the pride the Navy SEALs have for Sol, a plank owner for the entire organization.

In conclusion, I will add that he is a patriotic Alaskan through and through, and I thank him for all he has done for Alaska, for our veterans, and for America.

Sol, congratulations on being our Alaskan of the Week. Happy Fourth of July to you, to Alaska, and to all the men and women in our military and the citizens of our great Nation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, from all indications, our Republican friends continue to negotiate amongst themselves, behind closed doors, to revive the healthcare bill they had to pull from the floor on Tuesday.

I would suggest to my friends on the other side that there is no tweak or change or modification that will fix what is wrong with this Republican healthcare bill. The core of the bill is the problem. The American people are opposed to tax cuts for the wealthy and the reduction of the social safety net of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

The Republican TrumpCare bill is built on a crumbling, decrepit foundation, and that is because it is based on the premise that special interests and a very small number of wealthy Americans deserve a tax break while millions of Americans—middle class families, older Americans in nursing homes, folks with a preexisting condition—ought to receive less healthcare at a higher cost.

That idea is so backward, so out of step with what America wants and what actually works, it can never succeed, no matter how it is tweaked.

The one thing my Republican friends are latching on to—that their bill will

bring down average premiums several years down the line—is really a bait and switch. The bait is lower premiums, but the switch is higher deductibles and copays so that, in the end, the average American pays more than they would have otherwise. They are luring people in with a lower premium, but then they have to pay such a high percentage of their medical costs, the insurance policy is virtually worthless.

The Republican TrumpCare bill tells insurers they can offer much less generous healthcare plans than under the current system, even allowing States to opt out of covering essential benefits like treatment for opioids, mental health coverage, prescription drug coverage, and maternity care.

The result of these changes is that insurers may charge smaller premiums on some plans, but they will cover way less and, in fact, the deductibles and copays will go up—way up—in order to make the difference. So this isn't: Oh, you are not paying for some esoteric item; your insurance policy will pay for virtually nothing at the beginning if you have a high deductible.

The CBO report estimates that for an average 40-year-old with an income of \$26,500 a year, looking at insurance on the marketplace, deductibles would increase by thousands. If that 40-year-old decided on a "bronze" plan, for instance, their deductible would be \$6,000 a year, the CBO estimates. That is \$5,200 more than under current law. So we know what that means: They have to pay the first \$6,000 of healthcare, no matter what your insurance policy is. What good is that? Not much. Good for the insurance industry, maybe; not good for the average citizen. Some of my colleagues on the other side are claiming they want lower premiums, but if those lower premiums come with higher deductibles and higher copays, nobody benefits. It is a bait and switch.

What the Republican bill gives with one hand in this area, it more than takes away with the other because the lower premiums are made up for by higher deductibles and copays, so the average person pays more, not less, even when their premium goes down.

Who in America believes that folks should have higher out-of-pocket costs than before? Who in America believes that folks making over \$1 million a year—God bless them; they are doing well—deserve another \$57,000 tax break? Who in America believes that we should be making it harder to afford nursing home care or maternity care or opioid abuse treatment? Who in America believes a child born with a preexisting condition should hit their lifetime insurance limit before they even leave the hospital for the first time? Who believes in that in this America?

It turns out, almost no one. A poll yesterday showed that only 12 percent of Americans support the Republican bill. No amendment or compromise or tweak or adjustment in formula can solve that.

So I repeat the offer I made to President Trump and my Republican friends yesterday: Let's start over. Drop this fundamentally flawed approach—abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon tax breaks for the wealthy—and we can discuss the problems that Americans are actually concerned about: the cost, quality, and availability of healthcare.

I suggested that President Trump invite all Senators to Blair House to begin anew on a bipartisan approach to healthcare. Unfortunately, the President said I wasn't serious. Mr. President: Try me. The minute you make the invitation, we will take it in a very serious way. It is not that audacious of an idea. President Obama did the same thing early in his Presidency to discuss healthcare with Members of both parties in front of the American people. Our only condition: Drop the wrong-headed idea of slashing Medicaid to give tax breaks to the wealthy. It is perfectly reasonable, and a vast majority of Americans agree with us.

Nonpartisan institutions like the American Medical Association, the National Association of Medicaid Directors, AARP, and America's largest nursing home groups are all against the Republican approach. The Congressional Budget Office and other expert analyses say that it will not actually fix the problems in our healthcare system—high deductibles, high premiums, counties with too few insurance options—and the American people are as roundly against it as any piece of major legislation I have ever seen.

So I don't believe it is unserious to ask my Republican friends to drop this particular bill and talk to us about actually fixing the problems in our healthcare system.

I don't believe it is unserious to say to President Trump: You campaigned on bringing costs down and providing care for everyone. You campaigned on not cutting Medicaid and controlling the outrageous costs of prescription drugs. These are all your words in the campaign. Well, we Democrats agree with all of that. So let's talk about it.

Fundamentally, I don't believe that seeking a bipartisan solution on the great issues of our time should ever be considered unserious.

President Trump, you have complained about a lack of bipartisanship—unfairly, in our opinion. We are offering a way to implement bipartisanship, and right now it is you, not we, who are stopping it.

I hope my Republican friends, President Trump, and the majority leader think long and hard before dismissing our offer out of hand. I challenge them again: Invite all of us to Blair House the first day we get back from recess. If you think we are not serious, try us. Democrats are ready to turn the page on healthcare. When will my Republican friends realize it is time for them to do the same?

RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Finally, Mr. President, as to Russia sanctions, on June 15, nearly 2 weeks

ago, the Senate, in an act of bipartisanship, passed a tough Russia sanctions bill on a 98-to-2 vote. There are very few things of such significance that this body does with such a large bipartisan vote—Democrats and Republicans, all but two coming together.

The majority leader, Senator McConnell, and I worked hard to pass it before a possible meeting between President Trump and President Putin at the G20 summit. We wanted to send a message to Mr. Putin: If you interfere with our democratic institutions, you will be punished. These new sanctions should also help to deter future Russian interference.

At the Speaker's request, I hope this morning the Senate will pass a technical correction to address the blue-slip issue. It is important for Speaker RYAN to get the House to act on this legislation before the July 4th recess. It is critical that Congress speak in a loud, clear, and unified voice to President Putin: Interfering with our elections—the wellspring and pride of our democracy for over two centuries—will not be tolerated, and the United States will always respond forcefully, including with the power of economic sanctions.

I want to put the House on notice. If they water down the bill, weaken the sanctions, add loopholes to the legislation, they will find stiff resistance here in the Senate.

Later today, we will break for the July 4th recess. The Fourth of July is a day to remember the audacity of a ragtag group of colonies who declared themselves free and independent from the tyranny of one of the great, mighty foreign powers. What better way to mark the occasion than for the Congress of that once fledgling Nation—now the mightiest Nation in the world, ourselves—to pass a bill that says, 241 years since that fateful day, that we intend to defend our democracy as fiercely as the patriots who put down their plows and took up muskets on Bunker Hill did?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

VENEZUELA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak about the rise of a failed state, Venezuela, and the man-made tragedy President Maduro has imposed on his citizens.

For 3 months, Venezuelans have taken to the streets in daily protests. They are speaking out against their country's economic collapse, against widespread food shortages, the disintegration of their medical system, against endemic corruption, and

against a government that denies them their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Appallingly, President Maduro has responded to the protests by unleashing his National Guard. As a recent Washington Post article stated, "Mr. Maduro and the corrupt clique around him are hanging on by the brute force of tear gas, water cannons, mass arrests, and shootings by snipers."

Since April, Venezuela's increasingly unstable crisis has left over 75 dead, thousands jailed, and thousands more injured. Yet, instead of listening to his people's legitimate demands and mitigating this tragedy, President Maduro is attempting to rewrite the Constitution, despite widespread opposition. Additionally, he declared this week that "what couldn't be done with votes would be done with weapons."

This is our hemisphere. This is a hemisphere that prides itself in democratic states, and here is the President of Venezuela saying he doesn't care what the voters say. With Maduro threatening to use arms against his people, one can only imagine the bloodshed and abuses will continue unabated.

Despite these threats, protests endure because Venezuelans see no alternatives. They have no other recourse against standing in lines for endless hours to scour the empty shelves at their markets. They have no other way to channel their sorrow over the spike in maternal and infant mortality rates in hospitals that lack supplies to treat the most basic diseases. They have no other way to express their outrage at the military profiting from corruption in food procurement contracts, even while children increasingly suffer the ravages of malnutrition.

Parallel to the protests, chaos is becoming commonplace. In the past 72 hours, the National Guard troops have stormed the National Assembly and assaulted opposition legislators. They came into the Parliament and assaulted the opposition. The supreme court has stripped the attorney general, Luisa Ortega, of her authorities for her criticism of President Maduro.

We have seen lootings and the burning of government buildings. Alarmingly, a rogue police officer commandeered a helicopter and launched grenades and small arms fire while flying over the supreme court. These incidents from just the last 3 days should make it clear to all we are now dealing with a failed state in our own hemisphere.

As this crisis cripples Venezuela, I call on all sides to refrain from violence. I also want to recognize that the current situation is the product of 18 years of systematic efforts to dismantle Venezuela's democratic institutions.

Since coming to power, President Maduro—like Hugo Chavez before him—has filled the ranks of government with loyalists who have led the

economy to hyperinflation and the brink of default. State oil companies like PDVSA, the country's only source of revenue, has been purged of its expertise. In a truly devastating blow to democracy and the rule of law, the judiciary has been entirely sapped of its independence so it now functions as a political appendage of the executive branch.

In the 18 months since the opposition coalition won control of the National Assembly—and I must tell you there was hope when we saw the voters in Venezuela enacted a new government in their Parliament—the supreme court has overturned every piece of legislation passed, gave itself authority to approve the national budget, and in April temporarily usurped the rest of the legislature's authorities, completely reversing the will of the people.

Additionally, as Venezuela's civilian and military justice systems have become accomplices to persecution and torture, the number of political prisoners has soared. Leopoldo Lopez, Judge Afiuni, Daniel Ceballos—these are just some of the more well-known names among the more than 350 political prisoners recognized by Venezuelan human rights NGO Foro Penal. These are people who are in prison as a result of their political beliefs.

It is no surprise the decay of judicial independence has led to an alarming rise in corruption and impunity. It is now a stated fact that senior officials have syphoned billions out of Venezuela and are engaged in the illegal drug trade.

In response, the United States has designated a dozen people under the Kingpin sanctions, including Vice President Tareck El Aissami. Interior Minister Reverol was indicted in the United States last year for drug trafficking. Even Maduro's nephews were convicted in the United States on drug charges.

The sum of these trend lines is truly disturbing. Today, Venezuela is a failed state, where authoritarian leaders profit from links to corruption and drug trafficking, while the Venezuelan people are subject to precarious humanitarian conditions and human rights abuses. Against this backdrop, we require little explanation why more than 18,000 Venezuelans sought asylum in the United States last year.

We are all concerned about the flight of people at risk. What is happening in Venezuela directly impacts people trying to seek safety coming into the United States. If all this wasn't enough, in late 2016, Venezuelan State oil company PDVSA used its U.S. subsidiary Citgo as collateral to secure a loan from Rosneft, a company that is controlled by the Russian Government and is currently under U.S. sanctions. The result is, the Russian Government holds at least 49.9 percent of Citgo's mortgage and could come into control of critical U.S. energy infrastructure, including refineries, terminals, and a large network of pipelines. This should

concern every Member of the U.S. Senate.

So the question for the United States and the international community is, How do we respond? What do we do? We cannot let this circumstance continue.

Thankfully, supported by a growing diplomatic coalition that includes Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru, Canada, and the United States, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, is marshalling international pressure. Mr. Almagro has called on President Maduro to heed the demands of his citizens, free political prisoners, permit the delivery of humanitarian assistance, commit to a timetable for overdue elections, and restore the authority of the National Assembly.

However, despite Mr. Almagro's leadership, the results of last week's meeting of Foreign Ministers was a stunning failure to reach consensus on a hemisphere response. Appallingly, eight countries refused to vote their conscience, among them Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Trinidad, and Suriname. They did not use the power under the OAS to recognize that Venezuela today is not living up to its charter commitment to be a democratic state. There is a process at the OAS to take action. They were unable to do that—a major setback.

As efforts at the OAS continue, all must remain clear that there are no alternative facts when it comes to Venezuela, there is just a manmade tragedy that demands collective action.

While providing full support for multilateral diplomacy, the United States must also lead. In May, I introduced bipartisan legislation to address the multifaceted crisis in Venezuela. My bill will authorize humanitarian assistance and require the State Department to coordinate an international approach to humanitarian challenges. The legislation will also provide strong congressional backing for OAS efforts, as well as funding for international election observers and civil society groups working to defend human rights and democratic values.

Given the rising instability in Venezuela, the bill would codify two lines of targeted sanctions against Venezuelan officials involved in corruption and undermining democratic governance—the very authorities the administration used to rightly sanction members of the Venezuelan supreme court last month.

Congress should act, as we have done in so many other places where we show congressional leadership to make it clear that this type of activity will not be allowed to continue and that Congress will take a strong position to give appropriate authority to sanction those individuals who are responsible.

Finally, the bill would require the State Department and U.S. intelligence community to prepare a report on the role of Venezuelan officials in corruption and drug trafficking.

As the instability in Venezuela grows, every day we decide not to act only makes the crisis worse. I urge my colleagues to work with legislation I have filed. Let's work with the Congress and the President to make it clear to the Venezuelan people they are not alone, and we will not tolerate a country in our hemisphere to become a failed state.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORRECTING THE ENGROSSMENT OF S. 722

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 210, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 210) to correct the engrossment of S. 722.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on the measure.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, the question is on agreeing to the resolution.

The resolution (S. Res. 210) was agreed to.

(The resolution is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DIRECTING RETURN OF PAPERS REQUEST

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Secretary of the Senate be directed to request the return of the papers for S. 722 from the House of Representatives.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

REQUESTS FOR AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I have six requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They do not have the approval of the

Democratic leader for the eighth consecutive legislative day; therefore, they will not be permitted to meet after 1 p.m. I ask unanimous consent that the list of committees requesting authority to meet be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Committee on Environment and Public Works; Committee on the Judiciary; Committee on Intelligence.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, Congress and our country desperately need to have an honest, meaningful, transparent, and bipartisan conversation about improving our healthcare system. It shouldn't be a tall order, but around here things that seem common sense to the rest of the country are never simple. Instead, partisanship too often wins. We have seen that with the Senate Republican healthcare bill, as it was crafted behind closed doors without allowing any Democrats or the public to see it until it was a proposal.

It is good news that a vote on the bill was delayed, but we must continue to have this conversation as the debate continues. That bill was bad for North Dakota. Only when we seek real bipartisan solutions do I believe we will be successful in improving our healthcare system.

We need to reform our healthcare system. I have been saying it for years. In fact, I have proposed a number of fixes over the past 3½ years, but none of those fixes are embodied in the Republican healthcare bill. It is just not the right direction.

Just yesterday, I joined many of my colleagues to bring up some common-sense bills we can and should take up right now to make sure American families aren't hurt in the near term. We called on Republicans to work with us, but, unfortunately, they objected. I want to work in a bipartisan way. I want real healthcare reform. But, unfortunately, I do not believe everyone in Congress feels that way.

First, we need to talk about the facts of the Senate Republican bill—facts that are from very reputable non-partisan sources.

Earlier this week, the Congressional Budget Office issued a report reinforcing that the Senate Republican bill is just as terrible as the bill that came out of the House of Representatives a